

JACK BERGMAN
1ST DISTRICT, MICHIGAN

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2201

October 29, 2018

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Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Commissioners,

Today, only 40% of Americans in rural areas have access to reliable high-speed internet, and in rural Michigan, only a third of the population has access. While the Commission has made great strides in expanding access, the digital divide continues to impede development in rural communities.

After meeting with Packerland Broadband's leadership team to discuss their ongoing projects in my district, I had the opportunity to tour their facilities to see how they are helping connect rural America. Packerland is using TV white spaces (TVWS) technology to build a network that will eventually cover more than 80,000 people in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and northern Wisconsin. Using TVWS in conjunction with other technologies – such as fiber – will reduce deployment costs and help businesses bring broadband to rural areas where connectivity challenges persist.

However, regulatory uncertainty remains a significant factor in limiting the ability of companies like Packerland to pursue needed investments in TVWS. Packerland is eager to continue deploying innovative technologies to close the digital divide in rural America; however, the current regulatory environment disincentivizes companies from making costly investments in underserved areas.

The Commission could remove regulatory barriers by finalizing proceedings related to TVWS. Specifically, sufficient spectrum below 700 MHz should be made available for unlicensed broadband use, and additional rules should be adopted to enable Internet of things (IoT) innovations like precision agriculture and smart cities. We must do everything we can to help innovators like Packerland continue expanding access – not holding them back with regulatory uncertainty.

I appreciate the Commission's efforts to bridge the digital divide and believe that removing the regulatory barriers hindering TVWS development is consistent with your goals.

Kind regards,


Jack Bergman
Member of Congress



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

December 28, 2018

The Honorable Jack Bergman
U.S. House of Representatives
414 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

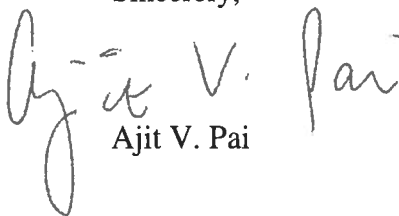
Dear Congressman Bergman:

Thank you for your letter regarding the importance of affordable and reliable broadband in communities with limited access. Having grown up in rural Kansas, I know what the digital divide is like. That's why closing that divide is my top priority—and one that the Commission is working on all fronts to support. And that's why this year we streamlined rules to deploy the next-generation of wireless connectivity, known as 5G, encouraged carriers to replace aging copper with super-fast fiber on an expedited basis, launched the first auction for millimeter-wave spectrum, increased federal support for our rural healthcare program and for small, rural carriers serving high-cost areas, and held our nation's first reverse auction for fixed broadband support. The results of these actions will be felt throughout America, and especially in rural America, where as you know the case to build out broadband is all the harder for any business to make.

I also agree with you that unlicensed spectrum in the TV white spaces—those channels on which no broadcaster is broadcasting—promises an opportunity for new wireless broadband deployments. That's why I have asked staff to continue working on the many details left unfinished by the prior Administration, including resolution of how to ensure database accuracy. This is no simple task—after all, TV white space devices must fully protect all incumbent services like broadcasting, private land-mobile radio, radio astronomy, and Wireless Medical Telemetry Service. But it is one the Commission's excellent staff is well-positioned to carry out.

Thank you for your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I may be of further assistance.

Sincerely,


Ajit V. Pai